CABINET – 9 SEPTEMBER 2026

PUBLIC QUESTIONS

1. Maralyn Hepworth

MEOLE BRACE PARK AND RIDE
Closure of this service in October will affect many people over a large area of Shropshire. Will the council reconsider this and keep the service open?

The Park and Ride services were originally put in to stop people going into Shrewsbury in cars and help with climate change. This is still the case.

I am disabled and use it to access Shrewsbury to shop, as do many others. It is frequent and we can get on and off around town. There always seems to be a number of people using it. Some of these, like me, will be socially isolated. A recent trip saw at least 20 passengers.

For a few years it hasn't been signposted so is difficult to find, and I have spoken to people who live nearer Oxon who use it as the Oxon car park can be full with Hospital staff and patient's cars.

Response:

Thank you for your question.

I recognise the points you have made regarding the original purpose of the Park & Ride network in helping to reduce traffic entering Shrewsbury and supporting wider environmental objectives. These remain important aims today.

However, it is important to stress that the decision to suspend the Meole Brace Park & Ride service has not been taken in isolation, nor has it been taken lightly. It forms part of a wider review of supported bus services across Shropshire as part of the 2026 bus retendering programme. The Council has had to consider the future of the supported bus network, balancing passenger usage, operating costs, connectivity and the role each service plays within the wider transport system.

The Council is facing significant financial pressures, with rising operating costs and reductions in available funding creating a substantial funding gap within the supported bus network. As a result, difficult decisions have been required across a number of services. The review was undertaken to ensure that the limited funding available could be targeted where it delivers the greatest overall benefit to residents across the county.

A key priority throughout this process has been the protection of vital public transport routes that many communities depend upon for access to work, education, healthcare and other essential services. In many parts of Shropshire, supported bus services provide the only realistic public transport option available. Through the retendering programme, the Council has sought to protect these essential links and maintain connectivity for communities that would otherwise risk becoming isolated.

In determining how best to allocate limited resources, the Council has followed the priorities set out in Shropshire's Bus Service Improvement Plan, which places particular emphasis on safeguarding important rural bus services where alternative transport options are limited. The decisions made through the review reflect those priorities.

The Council concluded that it could not continue to fund all three Park & Ride services while also maintaining essential bus connections elsewhere in the county. The decision was therefore taken to focus investment on the Oxon and Harlescott sites, enabling the delivery of an enhanced two-site Park & Ride network, newer vehicles, and extended evening services, while reducing overall operating costs. The sites will be upgraded too using separate capital funding.

While the Meole Brace service remains valued by many users, especially those travelling from the south of Shrewsbury, it had lower overall usage than the other Park & Ride sites and required a higher subsidy per passenger. The Council therefore had to balance the clear local benefits you have described against the wider need to maintain a sustainable countywide public transport network and protect key services relied upon by residents across Shropshire.

I fully appreciate that this is disappointing for regular users of the service, and I understand the concerns you have raised. However, the decision needs to be viewed in the context of the wider retendering programme and the difficult choices required to protect essential bus services across the county.

2. Tony Burton

As Cabinet is, I hope, aware, very many users of the Meole Brace Park & Ride service are shocked and bewildered by the decision to suspend it. The suspension will cause significant disruption to the lives of the several thousand who use it each week and will adversely affect other drivers and residents locally, who will suffer increased pollution and congestion – not least in the town centre itself.

People are at a loss to understand the basis for this decision, so please could Cabinet provide a breakdown of the weekly costs of providing the Meole Brace Park and Ride Service, under the headings of bus service provision, site maintenance, signage, promotion and other costs, both before and after the frequency was increased from 20 minute to 12 minute. Could Cabinet also indicate whether the increase in the receipts arising from the increase in frequency was taken into account when deciding the frequency at which the Park and Ride service should operate after 31 October, and if so, what that percentage increase was?

Response:

Thank you for your question.

I recognise the strength of feeling that exists regarding the future of the Meole Brace Park & Ride service and understand that many users will be disappointed by its withdrawal.

The Meole Brace Park & Ride service currently forms part of a single contracted arrangement covering all three Shrewsbury Park & Ride services: Meole Brace, Oxon and Harlescott. As such, some financial and operational information is held by the Council on a network basis rather than for each individual site.

Prior to June 2025, the three Shrewsbury Park & Ride services operated every 20 minutes. The contract awarded for the operation of the three-site network at that frequency was £16,740 per week.

In June 2025, following the award of Government Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) funding, all three Park & Ride services were enhanced to operate every 12 minutes. This increased the cost of operating the three-site Park & Ride network to £29,034 per week, and that arrangement continues until 31 October 2026.

Based on the current network, the annual cost of operating the Shrewsbury Park & Ride services is approximately £1.5 million per annum. This reflects the enhanced frequency and improved level of service introduced through the BSIP programme.

The enhancement from a 20 minute frequency to a 12 minute frequency achieved its intended objective of encouraging greater use of public transport.

Comparing the three months immediately before and after the introduction of the enhanced timetable, average monthly passenger journeys across the Shrewsbury Park & Ride network increased from approximately 34,500 journeys per month to approximately 38,000 journeys per month, whilst average monthly on-board revenue increased from approximately £28,000 per month to approximately £37,000 per month.

These increases in both passenger numbers and revenue were considered as part of the wider review. However, the challenge facing the Council was not simply one of patronage, but one of affordability. It is important to emphasise that the decision regarding Meole Brace was not based solely on the cost of that individual service. The Council's Local Bus Retendering Programme 2026 reviewed 21 supported bus services across Shropshire against a backdrop of significantly increased operating costs and reduced funding available to support local bus services.

As part of that process, alternative service levels and frequencies were considered. However, the review concluded that it was no longer affordable to continue funding three separate Park & Ride services in Shrewsbury whilst also protecting essential rural and inter-urban services elsewhere in the county. Cabinet was therefore required to consider whether limited funding should continue to support three separate Park & Ride services in Shrewsbury, or be used to protect essential public transport links elsewhere in the county, including services serving communities where there is no realistic alternative transport option.

Whilst I appreciate that many residents disagree with the outcome, Cabinet was required to consider the sustainability of the supported transport network across the county as a whole and reached its decision in that wider county-wide context.

3. Mike Streetly

S106 and CiL receipts
The council demands S106 and CiL commitments from developers to offset the negative impacts of their projects on local communities by funding important improvements to local facilities. Could you please provide a statement of the current S106 and CiL funds held by the council and timescales for the council's plans for spending these funds to deliver these improvements for local people?

Response:

Thank you for your question.

The Infrastructure Funding Statement is a statutory document and the Council will continue to publish it in accordance with national requirements.

The most recent Infrastructure Funding Statement covers the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 and provides a detailed account of developer contributions received, allocated and spent during that reporting year. It records that since the introduction of Community Infrastructure Levy charging, £75.8 million has been collected, with £33.7 million retained at 31 March 2025 for infrastructure investment. The statement also identifies infrastructure projects that have already received funding allocations as wellas potential future projects that may benefit from retained or future CIL receipts. The associated Section 106 reporting similarly identifies over £12.6 million of retained developer contributions linked to infrastructure requirements secured through legal agreements.

However, we recognise that communities, town and parish councils and local members require more timely and accessible information about developer contributions than can be provided through a single annual report alone. I have therefore previously asked officers to bring future reporting closer to the start of the financial year, so that the information is more current and useful for local planning and budgeting.

More importantly, the Council is shifting towards a more strategic approach. Following recommendations made through scrutiny, work is under way on the development of an Annual CIL Strategy. This will provide clearer direction and prioritisation for the use of CIL funding, strengthen links between developer contributions and the Council's wider infrastructure and capital priorities, and improve transparency around investment decisions.

Alongside the Annual CIL Strategy, we are moving towards more frequent reporting on CIL allocations and delivery. This will allow members, town and parish councils and local communities to see not only how much funding has been collected, but also where it has been allocated, the progress of schemes and the delivery of smaller local projects throughout the year, rather than relying solely on the annual Infrastructure Funding Statement

4. Chris Deaves

The government has announced its intention to transfer some Income Tax revenue to combined and mayoral authorities; some commentators suggest that 2.5% is a likely figure. Were Shropshire Council such an authority this would mean income of about £40M p.a. In light of local government changes suggested in the ‘English Devolution’ White Paper (HMCLG, Dec 2024), what steps is the Council taking to access this income stream?

Response:

The Council would naturally welcome any prospect of transferring Income Tax revenue to Councils, depending of course on the conditions attached. The basis of 2.5% seems highly optimistic but would be welcomed. The Council and I also note recent announcements by government and will continue to monitor the position. We are and will always be prepared to discuss options with government and neighbours moving forward. We will be bringing forward urgently a paper on forming a strategic authority.

5. Rod Himsley

1. Cabinet Approval SC/2024/0847 - Precisely what was approved by Cabinet on 15 October 2024 concerning the Whitchurch Library and Civic Centre?
2. Administration of the Cabinet decision - What formal actions, approvals and decisions were subsequently undertaken to administer and implement that Cabinet decision?
3. Financial provision - What capital or other approved financial provision was established following the Cabinet decision, and how has that provision subsequently appeared in the Council's financial and capital-programme records?
4. Current governance route - What formal governance, project and approval route is currently authorised for the Civic Centre, including responsibility for progressing any new proposal?
5. Community and long-term value - How will the Council ensure that the Civic Centre's established role as a centrally located community asset is properly considered alongside financial, property and alternative-use considerations? I am particularly concerned that the current position should not be prejudiced by historic inactivity, incomplete financial baselines, or informal discussions which have not yet been reconciled with the formal governance and financial position. My objective is not simply to preserve a building for its own sake. The Civic Centre occupies an important position within Whitchurch and has a longstanding community role. I believe the people of Whitchurch deserve a transparent, evidence-based and financially credible assessment of its future.

Response:

Question 1: Cabinet Approval SC/2024/0847 - In the 15 October 2024 cabinet minutes I can find no comment about the Whitchurch Library and Civic Centre. What was considered at that meeting was the Draft Financial Strategy, and I assume this is part of the reference you make about the Cabinet decision made at that meeting. That report included the anticipated Capital Expenditure for the year 2025/26 and I can find no reference to allocating any monies allocated to do any repairs to the Whitchurch Library and Civic Centre in the agreed minutes of that meeting. Previous to this, I note there is a report on a survey that was carried out in July 2024 and can be seen if a search is carried out. In February 2025, I note BBC Radio Shropshire carried a report which included the following statement by a member of that cabinet, "We're proposing to identify £4m of capital funding to help bring the centre back into use – whether this means a new roof or a complete rebuild will then depend on whether the working group and external partners can secure the additional government or other external funding that a rebuild would require." This therefore intimates that no actual finance to carry out any work, had at that time, been identified. Shropshire Council officers were of course continuing to monitor the building, including the continuation of investigations into future options for the site, further technical and financial assessment work, and ongoing engagement with key stakeholders regarding the future of the Civic Centre and Library.

The findings of that work have informed the report now before Cabinet and also answers part 2 your questions.

Question 3: Financial Provision - The position regarding financial provision is explained within the current Cabinet report. Cabinet previously included provision within the Council's capital strategy in connection with potential future works at the Civic Centre. However, any such provision remained subject to affordability, funding availability and subsequent approvals and did not constitute a fully funded and deliverable scheme. The Council's financial position has subsequently changed significantly, including the declaration of a financial emergency, receipt of Exceptional Financial Support and the issuing of a Best Value Notice. The current report therefore sets out the Council's present financial assessment and affordability position.

Question 4: Current Governance Route - The current governance route is the report now before Cabinet. Cabinet is being asked to consider the latest technical, financial, property and community information and determine the next steps regarding the future of the asset. Subject to Cabinet's decision, any subsequent actions would be progressed in accordance with the Council's approved governance, financial and property management arrangements, with appropriate officer and Member oversight.

Question 5: Community and Long-Term Value. Everyone here at the Council fully recognises the significant community, civic and historic importance of Whitchurch Civic Centre.

The report before Cabinet does not consider financial factors in isolation. It draws upon technical assessments, condition surveys, needs analysis work, stakeholder engagement and consideration of the building's role within the wider community. The report also recognises the importance of the site to residents, community groups, businesses and the wider town centre. Members are therefore being asked to consider a broad range of factors including community benefit, service needs, financial sustainability, asset condition, legal obligations, affordability and future opportunities for the site. Cabinet's decision will be taken having regard to all relevant evidence presented within the report.

I and the cabinet, have been constantly reminded by your local members of how important this building is to your community. The Council has and will continue to ensure that decisions regarding the future of the Civic Centre will be taken in as much as possible a transparent, evidence-based way which includes a clear understanding of both financial and community considerations. The purpose of the current report is to provide Cabinet and the community with the most up-to-date evidence available.

6. John Palmer

There's a national and local emergency: there's not enough housing that younger people can afford to buy or rent. So how does it feel to Cabinet that you're just about to write off around £4m put towards your housing company?

Response:

The short answer is this Cabinet is extremely concerned it is having to make this decision today on the back of various previous mistakes. We are very aware of the requirement for additional local housing, not only for young people but for the wider population of Shropshire. As you have described there is a housing emergency, but following poor past decisions by previous administrations, such as setting up CDL in the way it was, there is also the council's financial emergency. The report that will be discussed later makes clear that every potential option carries a significant cost. The responsible choice is the one that limits further losses, protects taxpayers and avoids taking on millions more of borrowing that this council simply cannot afford. Furthermore, lessons must be learnt from this experience that such enterprises should not be encouraged again without clear protection to the Council.

7. Paul Wiseman (late question accepted by Chair)

The Government-commissioned CIPFA External Assurance Review identifies Whitchurch Civic Centre's RAAC works as one of the capital schemes paused during the Council's financial rationalisation and then immediately considers the Council's financial exposure to Cornovii Developments Ltd. CIPFA also found that there was "no documented prioritisation framework" setting out the explicit criteria used when individual capital scheme decisions were made. Cabinet is now being asked at the same meeting to approve the structured closure of Cornovii, with an estimated minimum loss to the Council of around £4 million, and the disposal of Whitchurch Civic Centre, for which approximately £4 million is said to be required to return the building to sustainable use. Can Cabinet confirm whether the financial future of Cornovii and Whitchurch Civic Centre has been considered together, directly or indirectly, as part of the Council's Financial Sustainability and Recovery Strategy; what financial trade-offs between the two were considered; and whether any asset sales, capital receipts, loan recoveries, write-offs or other accounting consequences arising from either decision can affect the financing or affordability of the other?

Response:

These are two separate and unrelated issues. One has no bearing on the other.

For Cornovii the situation as it stands at 31st March 2026 is that the estimated value of the company at closure will be approximately £4m below that stated on the Council's balance sheet. Any delay in the closure will act to increase this amount. The estimate is based on a range of assumptions, some of which will change over the coming months and will require the closest scrutiny through updated governance arrangements. Essentially, the Council will need to make a one-off call on revenue reserves which, in reality, will be a £4m call on the next application for Exceptional Financial Support (EFS). This 'technical' adjustment is subject to external audit and will be required under accounts and audit regulations. The Council will take further professional advice in advance of closing the accounts (probably during the course of 2027/28) to ensure that our accounting adjustment is correct and the best option for the Council.

For Whitchurch, the estimated cost of work to fix the RACC issue with the roof and bring the building back into use is entirely coincidental. It is simply the best estimate obtained for the costs involved in recommissioning the building. In this case, the decision being taken is driven by the financial emergency and the conditions implied by EFS. The decision means that the Council will not need to borrow to carry out the work and then to pay financing costs on the debt for an extended period (likely to be 40 years).

Both decisions are consistent with the Financial Sustainability and Recovery Strategy agreed by Cabinet in July as required by MHCLG. They represent prudent and practical steps to support the Council through very difficult financial circumstances that have been growing over a number of years. Neither Cornovii nor Whitchurch are new issues for the Council, and the administration is keen to act as quickly as is practically possible to resolve these long existing problems and do all that it can to preserve statutory and other valued services. Further reports in a similar vein should be expected as the Council moves to balance the budget for 2027/28 with the minimum possible level of EFS.